

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT UPDATE

June 1999

VOAD is proven resource for relief efforts

By Lloyd Jackson
Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster

(Editor's Note: 1998's Hurricane Mitch was responsible for more than 9,000 deaths, primarily from rain-induced flooding in portions of Central America, and ranks as one of the deadliest Atlantic tropical cyclones in history. As Hurricane Preparedness Month begins, it is fitting to highlight the relief efforts of one local volunteer organization in response to this deadly storm.)

In a region poor by many standards, Hurricane Mitch's visit to Central America could indeed be seen as a great equalizer. Ignoring education, wealth, social class, religious affiliation and political loyalties, Mitch unleashed its fury killing thousands, leaving others homeless and destroying much of the infrastructure of the affected countries.

Relief efforts began almost immediately and included a call from the Richmond-based International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention for 50 volunteer teams to go to the affected areas between mid-November and late-December.

The Virginia Baptist Mission Board, through its parent organization, the Baptist General Association of Virginia, is a member of Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster or VOAD. My work with both VOAD and the board would send me on a holiday journey of hope.

As the Virginia Baptist Mission Board's disaster relief coordinator, I assembled two volunteer teams assigned to Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, and Pespire, located two hours to the south.

In Tegucigalpa, John Gordon led his five-member work team based in a local school. They unloaded food trucks, re-packaged food for distribution, delivered water, assisted with loading vehicles with supplies and maintained the water system at the school.



Medical team members meet with patients in the Pespire clinic. (Photo by Lloyd Jackson)

I served as the leader of the medical team in Pespire, which included three family physicians, a Honduran native pediatrician and her husband (who served as a translator), two registered nurses, one licensed practical nurse, one fourth-year medical student, a retired missionary from Honduras, and two Honduran university students who also worked as translators.

In more than 30 years of relief and recovery operations, I have seen much devastation throughout the world. Both John and I saw parallels between the scene we witnessed in Honduras and that of 1969's Hurricane Camille in terms of massive flooding and mudslides. The airports had reopened by the time we arrived but we often had to make a path

around areas where roads were washed out and bridges were damaged.

We set up our clinic in the Pespire Baptist Church with medical stations in the main room, a pharmacy on the stage, and church members serving as registrars. We knew we had our work cut out for us. Pespire's political region has a population of 25,000. Mitch destroyed 1,000 houses, killed 80 people, and left 15,000 homeless.

I was truly impressed by the spirit and perseverance of the people, many of whom walked up to 15 miles to get to the clinic only to wait in line for hours. During the five and one-half days our clinic operated, our team members examined about 2,000 patients and filled more than 8,000 prescriptions.

Though there weren't a lot of surprises, we did learn more translators are needed for medical teams to work with nurses in the pharmacy filling prescriptions and explaining dosages to patients or family members who cannot read.

Accurate field intelligence is also critical — particularly in terms of supplies. For example, we brought a "ton" of antibiotics only to find we really needed more vitamins, intestinal and pain medications. *(continued on page 4)*

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Virginia schools get ready for tornadoes

Like a rapidly spiraling funnel cloud, Virginia's Tornado Preparedness Day gained rapid momentum in school systems across the state.

Approximately 40 schools (or school systems) and businesses "rose to the occasion" when Governor Jim Gilmore issued a proclamation calling for schools, businesses, and citizens to participate in a statewide drill on March 23.

To increase awareness and preparedness, many participating schools and localities developed or fine tuned their emergency plans and requested the VDES "Tornado — Plan to Survive" kit. Then, they joined VDES, the National Weather Service, and county and city emergency services offices in a drill designed to test these plans.

In Orange County, emergency services coordinators Shep Elmore, Duff Green, and Robert Kelley conducted what they termed a "near perfect" drill including more than 3,800 students in seven area schools. Prior to the drill, the coordinators worked with Charles Higgins from the Orange County School Board to ensure schools downloaded drill plans from the Internet and received Red Cross tornado safety pamphlets.

According to Green, they actually conducted a total of three drills. Due to scheduling conflicts, Orange County High School conducted their own test on March 25. Later, based on their performance in the first drill, the middle school staff revised their plan and conducted a follow-up test.

Green explained that Prospect Heights Middle School is designed with a lot of glass in it and is situated on a hill, thus raising significant questions about safe areas to congregate during a tornado. Green also commended the elementary school students who outperformed their older counterparts across the board.

"The [elementary school] students listened and followed every instruction while the teachers followed their recommended procedures closely," said Green. "The teachers looked like setting hens with their chicks as they crouched in their safe zones."

Jim Davis, Pittsylvania County Director of Emergency Management and Communications, coordinated his locality's participation in the drill, which included more than

9,300 students from 20 public and one private school, along with personnel from the bus shop, educational/cultural center, and the main school board office.

Davis says he conducted two practice drills prior to the statewide test to allow staff and faculty to critique themselves in a



(Pittsylvania Co. Schools)
A Twin Springs Elementary School teacher positions students during their tornado drill.

"relaxed environment." He credits great faculty cooperation as the key to getting all students and faculty into safe zones in less than a minute and a half.

Davis says this quick reaction time is critical as he estimates his residents have a four-minute threshold of warning in which local conditions can escalate from a severe thunderstorm to a tornado.

"A tornado touched down within sight of one of our schools and demolished a house. School resumed the next day," said Davis. "Our children understand we have the same ability to be impacted by severe weather as anywhere else."

The next Tornado Preparedness Day will be held on March 28, 2000. For more information, contact Janet Clements at (804) 897-6510.

First Slayton scholarships awarded



The Virginia Emergency Management Association has passed the torch of excellence to two emergency services veterans who have been named as the first recipients of the Addison E. Slayton, Jr., Scholarship.

Cindi Causey and Winnie Pennington each received \$750 grants at the Virginia Emergency Management Conference on Severe Weather in Williamsburg, Va., in March.

Causey is the Stafford County Deputy Coordinator of Emergency Services and has been with the county since 1990. She is working on her Bachelor of Integrated Studies degree majoring in Public Administration and Emergency Management at George Mason University.

Causey has received both her Certified Emergency Manager and Virginia Professional Emergency Manager designations. She has recently been appointed to the VEMA board to help certify other managers.

"I was very honored to be one of the two original recipients of the Slayton scholarship," Causey said. "I think he [Addison Slayton] has done great things

for the emergency management field and it was a good idea to start a scholarship in his name."

A 10-year VDES veteran, Pennington is a preparation and recovery specialist in the Emergency Operations Center. Prior to her present position coordinating search and rescue operations, Pennington also served for three years as a communications officer.

Pennington is currently in a liberal arts degree for transfer program at John Tyler Community College and hopes to enroll in the University of Richmond's Emergency Services Management Program. She says the extra money will help her to more quickly complete the courses needed to reach her goals.

Lynda Price, Chesterfield's Emergency Services Coordinator and scholarship committee chairman, says the seven scholarship applicants were judged on a weighted scale with points awarded for criteria such as degree program and years of service.

"No dollar figure has been set for these scholarships," says Price. "They are awarded from conference profits. This year's monetary awards correspond with the fees charged for one college course."

HAZ MAT

Ammonia release tests Bedford response plans

In what may have seemed like a scene from “Mission Impossible,” an ammonia release at the Professional Food Service Plant in Bedford, Va., set the clock ticking for responders dispatched to crack the proverbial repair “code.”

Leaks are not a new occurrence at this facility and can usually be corrected internally. This leak, however, proved to be something altogether different, testing the sleuthing skills of responders at all levels and setting in motion the events that follow.

Friday, March 19. Plant management detects a mechanical malfunction causing an ammonia release and dispatches their mechanical contractor to make repairs. By 4:30 p.m., it becomes apparent that outside help will be needed. A short time later, David Nichols, Bedford County Emergency Services Coordinator, calls in the incident and asks for assistance from VDES.

Hazardous Materials Officer Tommie Crozier responds with the Roanoke Valley Hazardous Materials Response Team. On scene, Crozier, the facility’s mechanical contractor, and the Hazmat Team make plans to enter the mechanical room and repair the leak. Though they make several entries in Level A suits, the team cannot stop the leak.

Saturday, March 20. At approximately 7:30 a.m., Crozier notifies Greg Britt, VDES Hazardous Materials Field Manager, that they are unable to stop the leak and asks for guidance. After a short conversation, Crozier and Britt agree this incident is beyond the scope of local and state authorities and requires federal assistance.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency responds with their technical group and the U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Strike Team. The EPA contingent arrives at about 5 p.m. along with HMO Brian Iverson who will relieve Crozier. During the night and early morning hours, the Coast Guard Strike Team and mechanical contractor make several entry attempts.

Sunday, March 21. Iverson meets with the Bedford city manager and school board members. Bedford Elementary School is less than two-tenths of a mile from the site and would need to be evacuated should conditions deteriorate. The group agrees no major ventilation will be done between 6 a.m. and 4 p.m. to keep the school out of the danger zone.

Monday, March 22. Britt and Technological Hazards Division Director Ralph Jones visit the scene. The teams continue their entry work and bring in a consultant. They develop and continually revise their response plan in an attempt to solve the pungent puzzle while area media, city, and school officials receive regular updates.

Wednesday, March 24. After 116 hours, Nichols marks the incident under control at 1 p.m. with no injuries reported.

“This was a well-coordinated incident that demonstrates how quickly everything falls into place when you use the unified incident command system,” says Nichols. “Industry representatives were included in the command structure along with federal, state, and local members, which minimized conflict between the owner and levels of government.”

The Latest “Update”

Heeding the call ... Hazardous Materials Officer **Bobby Clark** has left the agency following more than nine years of exemplary service in which he has made his mark on both VDES and the emergency management field. Originally hired as a resource officer for the Technological Hazards Division, Clark quickly moved to the field when a hazardous materials officer position opened in Radford, Va.

According to Greg Britt, Hazardous Materials Field Manager, Clark has been “a major contributor” to VDES with a wealth of knowledge on safety and hazmat issues. One prime example, according to Britt, is the bonding and grounding procedure Clark developed that has become a standard throughout the country.

Clark also served as a principle member of the National Fire Protection Association’s Hazardous Materials Response Committee, which makes recommendations for hazmat response throughout North America. Clark credits VDES management with supporting his work with the NFPA committee to give the agency a voice in the national arena.

In addition to his other duties, Clark shared his knowledge as an instructor in the chemistry of hazardous materials for the National Fire Academy. Now, the teacher is studying for his Bachelor of Science degree in Church Ministries through the Oral Roberts University School of Lifelong Education and will pursue full-time ministry work with his wife, Pam, and son, Torrey.

“This has been a very rewarding experience for me,” says Clark. “I know I’m doing what I need to do, but it’s hard to leave such a wonderful place to work and the many friends I’ve made along the way.” *(continued on page 4)*

Restoration study powers up

For most of us, storm-related power outages are not unexpected occurrences. However, weather phenomena like last December’s ice storm can move far beyond the occasional nuisance flickering of lights to prolonged power outages with serious consequences.

At VEMA’s request, Virginia Power recently hosted a forum to discuss electric power service, restoration protocols, and communications/reporting requirements.

Co-sponsored by VEMA, VDES, the Virginia Association of Electric Cooperatives, and the State Corporation Commission Bureau of Energy Regulation, the event opened dialogue on the electrical system and damage assessment/reporting methods.

George Urquhart, VDES Director of the Preparedness and Mitigation Division, explained that, following the ice storm, field operations teams could not verify or confirm with any certainty when power would be

restored to customers. In many cases, he says initial estimates were off by a significant margin.

Following the meeting, a study team was assembled to prepare a report proposing guidelines for resolving identified shortfalls in communications, reporting, validation and dissemination of data.

Urquhart says he expects study results to be available this summer.

For more information, contact George Urquhart at (804) 897-6583.



Training Calendar

Emergency Management

Basic Public Information

Officer Course

June 8-10
Charlottesville

Emergency Planning Course

June 15-17
Roanoke

Principles of Emergency Management

June 22-24
James City County

Developing Volunteer Resources

June 29-30
Salem

Rapid Assessment Planning Workshop

June 30-July 1
Abingdon

Mass Fatalities Incident Management

July 13-15
Roanoke

Exercise Design

July 21-22/Lebanon
August 4-5/Charlottesville

Effective Communication

July 27-29
Roanoke

Decision Making and Problem Solving

August 10
Richmond

Coordinator's Briefing

August 11-12
Culpeper

EOC Operations and Management

August 17-19
Salem

ICS/EOC Interface

August 24-25
Culpeper

Reservist Training

Information and Planning Branch Workshop

June 12
Richmond

VEOC Tabletop Exercise II

June 17 & August 5
Richmond

Rapid Assessment Workbook Overview

July 8
Richmond

Technological Hazards

Contingency Planning for Airline/Airport HAZMAT Workshop

June 9
Fort Eustis

Search and Rescue

Incident Commander for Ground SAR

June 26-27
Charlottesville

(continued from page 1)

Medical conditions ranged from common ear infections to cancer and malaria. Yet, concerns went far beyond the physical and we worked long hours to address each human need. One woman revealed she had held onto a tree and watched her house and the rest of her family washed away.

A man shared that his wife and son had been killed when mud poured into their home up to the ceiling.

More than 2,000 persons in Pespire and thousands more in

Tegucigalpa received much needed medicine and supplies.

Yet, that is not the end of the story. We are committed to ongoing relief efforts in Nicaragua and Honduras with 12 more teams scheduled through December 1999.

VOAD has trained volunteers ready to assist in emergency situations and can be a valuable resource for recovery efforts at home and abroad.

For more information on VOAD or its member organizations, contact me at (804) 672-2100.

..... "Update" (continued from page 3)

Goodbye Dan, we hardly knew ye ... **Dan Rotermund**, the agency's first full-time hurricane planner, has headed south to accept a position as senior management analyst with the state of Florida, Division of Emergency Management. The retired Coast Guard officer joined the Preparedness and Mitigation Division in July 1998, bringing with him a wealth of experience in large-scale operations planning and response. He says he packed his bags quickly to lend a hand to Florida's wildland fire activation.

Passing the baton. **Barbara Bowen** joined the VDES Public Information Office in April as the *Update* Managing Editor following Jo Hoots' departure for a position with the Virginia Community Policing Institute. She comes to the agency by way of the Fort Lee Public Affairs Office where she served first as the post's community relations officer and then as command information officer. She honed her public affairs skills during a 10-year tenure promoting the U.S. Army's "hub of logistics," which included a stint as managing editor for the Fort Lee *Traveller* newspaper. She looks forward to working with each of you to inform, recognize, and promote professional development for emergency managers throughout Virginia.



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Richmond, VA 23236-3713

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UPDATE is a monthly publication of the Virginia Department of Emergency Services. For permission to reprint articles in your publication or on the Internet, please call 804/897-6510.

State Coordinator...Michael Cline
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Executive Editor...Janet L. Clements
Managing Editor...Barbara B. Bowen

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